

LifeGroup Study
2024-05-05
SKEPTICS WELCOME
I Don't Want to Be Part of the Church
Leader Notes

OVERVIEW: Welcome back to our series, Skeptics Welcome. For week 5 of our series we are looking at this objection - "I don't want to be part of the church." Many people in Canada are taking a hard pass on church. There are lots of reasons why, but the reality is that most people in our country are not involved in a church community. Today we will explore the truth that God has designed you to experience your best life as an active part of the church. Although our church experience won't be perfect, God can use your participation in church to help you flourish in your faith and your relationships with others.

ICEBREAKER: My Experience of Church

I grew up in a church-going family. Most Sunday mornings we would attend our church for a service. But my experience of church was much more than what happened for an hour on Sunday. I experienced my parent's faith as they were involved in ministry group, a gathering of about 12 people who met regularly to grow their faith together. I experienced community and serving as part of a dynamic youth group in my later high-school years. Although my church experience has not been perfect, it has been something God has used to shape my life in profound ways. How about you? What has been your experience of church over the years? Is there a key event or impression to comes to mind? **Share your story with the group!**

STUDY:

1. How did you view "church" when you were growing up? How has your perception of church changed over the years?
2. On Sunday we looked at the reality that many people today are saying "no" to church. A 2019 Statistics Canada report indicated that over 75% of Canadians don't attend religious services. **Why do you think so many Canadians are saying "no" to church?**

LEADER NOTE: We looked at four reasons a) Materialism – we have more affluence and more options that compete with church. I may be skeptical about the value of church compared to other options. b) Secular Worldview – our culture values self-directed individualism. We are skeptical of people or organizations telling us what to do. c) Church Hurt – we may have personal stories or we have heard stories of people hurt by the church. I may be skeptical of church leaders and culture. d) Sunday has changed. So has the family. We no longer see Sunday as a day set aside for church and family. I may be skeptical of what appears to be an outdated way of life.

WHY CHURCH?

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ... NIV

3. Jesus' death for our sins, his burial and resurrection is of "first importance". **How does this speak to the question – "why church?"**

LEADER NOTE: We might ask, "Why is the church important in our world?" "Why is the church important in my life?" The value of church is predicated on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This Gospel message is the reason for the church. It is of "first importance", meaning we should place "first importance" on being part of the movement that formed as a result of this message.

WHAT IS CHURCH?

Church is **EKKLESIA** (Greek NT word meaning "the called out assembly")

READ: 1 Peter 2:9

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." NIV

4. Church is a "called out" people. According to this verse, what does it mean to be part of the *ekklesia*?

LEADER NOTE: Being part of the *ekklesia* means we are a "called out" people. This begins with *who we are*. We are a "chosen people". God has "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." It continues with *what we do*. We are a "royal priesthood" called out to priestly service – to FOLLOW JESUS, LOVE GOD and LOVE PEOPLE. It is expressed in *how we live* as God's holy people, called to praise God and share the hope of Jesus in our world.

Church is **FAMILY**

READ: Ephesians 1:5

"God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure." NLT

5. Church is a *family* I belong to. What are the benefits of this? What can be some of the challenges?

LEADER NOTE: The #1 benefit is we belong to God's forever family. God is our Father and we are his dearly loved children. God has blessed us with a spiritual family here on earth, the church. We have brothers and sisters in Christ. Being family together is a wonderful blessing, but it also comes with

challenges. Reading Paul's letters to the NT church remind us that being family isn't easy. There is a cost. But with God's help, we can persevere and flourish in God's family, the church.

Church is a **BODY**.

READ: Ephesians 4:15-16

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." NIV

6. Church is a *body* I am *part of*. According to these verses, what does it mean to be part of the body of Christ?

LEADER NOTE: Being part of the body of Christ means I have been given an active role to play. God has given me gifts and abilities to help the body grow. He gives me meaningful work in the body of Christ. As we serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, God helps us grow to maturity and build one another up in Jesus' love.

HOW CAN I HELP PEOPLE WHO ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT CHURCH?

READ: 1 Peter 3:15

Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. THE MESSAGE

7. In this verse we are encouraged to be ready to speak up for Jesus when we have the opportunity. **What can I do to be ready?**

LEADER NOTE: Being ready means I'm open to engaging with people who are skeptical about the church. Your group members can grow their heart to be ready by praying for people they know who may be skeptical. I can get ready by thinking through my testimony about my faith in Jesus and involvement in the church. Who is Jesus to me? Why is the church of "first importance" to me? Your group members could write out their story and practice by sharing their story with each other.

8. When we speak with skeptics, we should do it "always with the utmost courtesy". The NIV says to do this with "gentleness and respect". **How can this approach make me helpful to skeptics?**

LEADER NOTE: Being courteous is key. This is about the posture of our heart in the relationship. We are helpful when we are humble, curious and intentional. One of the key frustrations expressed by young adults who have left the church is they didn't feel listened to. Asking a skeptic courteous questions to learn more about their story and how they have come to their position opens the way to a helpful conversation.

9. Based on today's study, what might you say to someone who says – "I believe in God, but I don't need the church. I can grow my faith on my own."?

10. In his book, Think Like Jesus, Randy Frazee says, "The church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today." How has today's study helped you appreciate the value and purpose of the church?

PRAYER:

Spend some time thanking God for the church! Pray for someone you know who is skeptical about church. Ask God to grow the value of church in your heart. Ask Him to help you flourish as an active part of His family, the body of Christ.